TEACHING TRAJECTORY IN AN E-LEARNING COURSE

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Abstract

This report deals with e-learning with an emphasis on the tutor´s motivational activities. It introduces us to some research results which indicate that there is a relationship between the tutor´s motivating intervention and completing and passing the e-learning course. Apart from monitoring the teaching trajectory in relation to the completion and passing of an e-learning course, it also deals with the relationship between the tutor´s motivating activities and the timing and finishing of the e-learning course.

Key words: Tutor, Tutoring, E-learning, Teaching Trajectory, Home Study.

1 Introduction

E-learning has recently become a phenomenon which broadens the palette of educational methods. When e-learning began, the emphasis was put mainly on the technology which enabled this modern way of teaching. Not only IT workers but also teachers and tutors were excited and often also blinded by the possibilities which e-learning offers. As an example we can mention the unlimited access to teaching material in relation to place and time, the efficiency of teaching, the easy innovation and updating of teaching material, multimedia, the high level of interactivity, elaborate verification and the individual pace of self-study.

There have been some changes in the current view of e-learning and it is necessary to point out that they are positive ones. The initial e-learning phase was based on a technological concept within which there was a significant effort above all to use as many media as possible, with on-line distribution, on-line communication and the possibilities of electronic testing. Lately however, it has become clear that it is necessary to do something more in order to make e-learning effective. The advantages of e-learning are not a guarantee that students will complete their studies successfully. Therefore over the past several years a pedagogical concept of e-learning has began to prevail which puts emphasis on the actual educational process; educational aims; students´ individual needs; and which takes into consideration the entry predispositions for studying or respects different learning styles. (Všetulová, 2007, page 37)

2 Tutor and his role in e-learning

E-learning is also connected with some risks, which are detailed in a specialist text called The Disadvantages of E-learning. Among these disadvantages there are often mentioned the following ones: dependency on technologies, incompatibility of components, unsuitability for certain course types, unsuitability for certain student types and so on. (Barešová, 2003, page 33) I believe though that the main problem of e-learning in connection with the successful completion of studies is the absence of contact between the student and the teacher. The effort to minimize the influence of the missing interaction between the one being educated – the object of the educational process and the one providing education has two attitudes.

The first attitude is through blended learning, which does not eliminate from the educational process the personality of the teacher but at the same time it absorbs the latest technological knowledge through which the new material can be interpreted to students in a better and better way. So blended learning offers to students the possibility of studying through an electronic textbook but real social contact both with the teacher as well as with classmates is kept.

The second attitude is based on the fact that the system LMS enables one to create a "virtual" classroom where students meet and communicate among themselves, have contact with the tutor etc. There used to be great hopes put into these virtual classrooms and significantly higher effectiveness was expected from these teaching/learning forms of education. Among other reasons this was supposed to be due to the fact that a student was not an isolated entity here but he/she instead became a member of a virtual group of students who were able to communicate within the group and also with the tutor. As is obvious from the above mentioned facts, the development of e-learning technologies was going in the direction towards a state which simulates an interaction process common in educational environment. It is an interaction between the object of the educational process and the educator. In classical forms of education the interaction between these two entities is quite common and its existence and intensity depends on the chosen educational method. Therefore the development of e-learning lead to the existence of "a virtual teacher", "a virtual leader", "a tutor" who acts in e-learning courses as an evaluator, commentator, consultant or transmitter of various online discussions on a certain specialist topics.

Specialist literature often defines a tutor as a person who monitors the activity of e-learning students, regulates them and manages them. At the same time he/she verifies the knowledge and skills of students. (Kopecký, 2006, page 53) The above mentioned activities belong among the basic tutor´s tasks and he is possibly remunerated for them. If, however, the tutor approaches the position of a mediator between the material to be learnt and the student in a responsible way, his/her tutor´s duties are also to motivate the e-learning students in such a way that they finish their studies successfully and on time.

Based on the experience which I have had during my tutorial praxis I would like to state some of the essential tutor´s activities:

● it is necessary to address the students with an introductory email or banner after the e-learning modules are opened and made accessible

● continual motivation of students which comes from monitoring of the students´ activities , which is acquired through LMS utilities

● moderate of discussions through access rights which the tutor will get from the LMS administrator

● send evaluative email to all students who complete the studies. It is necessary that also the students who did not manage to complete the course are approached by email.

● if the system LMS does not make it possible it is very appropriate to publish the success of the students. In case there is a large number of students who are basically anonymous towards each other it is appropriate to publish at least the statistical data about the successful and unsuccessful students.

3 Teaching trajectory

I focus my current research on the tutor´s activity which I consider fundamental in terms of e-learning study. It is continual motivation of students.

It is obvious from literature on the subject (Všetulová, 2007, page 110) that a student should be able to set short-term goals, check their fulfillment continuously and draw a conclusion for further study from each check up. The intensity of study gradually decreases with time if an e-learning course student is not able to set short-term goals of his/her study (Všetulová, 2007, page 110) A student without contact with a tutor is often not able to set short-term goals which, in an ideal case, causes abundant study activity before the final term of study. In the worse case the absence of short-term goals causes the student to not finish the studies. I call the graph of dependence of working intensity of the student on time in case of absence of contact with a tutor and therefore non-existence of short-term goals a modified bell curve.

The course of dependency when short-term goals are in existence is more optimistic in the sense that the decrease of the student´s working intensity is not so dramatic because the motivating benefit of a tutor brings with itself the effect of partial terms. This ensures a rather wavy progress of the curve. I call it a wavy curve.

From my research, which studies the influence of the motivating work of a tutor on the shape of teaching trajectory and its length (timing of the finalization of study), it is obvious that the correlation between these factors is high.

The total number of 498 student teachers was divided into two groups (A,B),of 249 members. Both groups were approached with an introductory email in which the members of the group were introduced briefly to the system of learning/teaching, its schedule, conditions for finishing individual program units and the whole course. Naturally with both groups the tutor reacted to specialized questions related to the content of the study. The research therefore could not devaluate the primary aim which was the implementation and successful completion of the project. Nevertheless, group A was approached with several motivating emails during their study period which lasted for 3 months, in which the tutor evaluated the current students´ activities and encouraged them in their further effort.

260 students out of the total number 498, which is 52.2 %, finished their three-month-long course successfully. 71% of these 260 students were members of the A group. 238 students did not finish the study, which was 27 % from the group A.

Naturally, apart from the tutor´s activity it is necessary to mention the existence of many other factors which may influence the successful completion of an e-learning course. Among these factors there may be higher internal or external motivation such as students´ family situation, ambitions, age, work position and so on. Nevertheless, I consider the above mentioned data to be reliable. The research sample was chosen from the total number of 1131 teachers. 498 people were chosen from this number, who really began the e-learning study and in so doing they showed their interest in it. This chosen sample was created on the basis of public inquiry because the students were involved in it on the basis of their own decision. This sample was then randomly divided through the method of group choice into two groups with the same number of students. The method of group choice was then modified with a proportional share choice so that teachers from the same schools were represented in both groups equally.

When we look at the results of the research of timing of finishing of the course in relation to its timeline, the results are following:

Completion of the course	Group A	Group B
1st month	18	11
2nd month	66	19
3rd month	101	45
Total	185	75

Chart No.1: *Students´ success according to the month of completion of the course.*

It is obvious from Chart No 1 that a motivated student, a student who has frequent contact with the tutor, reaches the short-term goals presented to him by the tutor more intensely. This fact then leads such a student not only to gradual and more continuous study but also to the effort to finish the study earlier and successfully. Naturally, it is necessary to consider with group A and B a certain number of students who always fulfill their tasks diligently. The first month data shows that with these randomly chosen groups the number of students who finished the study in the first month is approximately the same. In the second month the influence of the tutor begins to show significantly because the active students finished their study in the first month and there is a minimum of unmotivated students from group B who finished their study in this month. A similar situation repeats in the last month of the study, when the number of successful students from group A prevails significantly.

4 Conclusion

I stated some conclusions of a pilot research in my report. The aim was to prove a hypothesis about the influence of active and continual motivation of students by a tutor on timing and successful finishing of an e-learning study. The research is being carried out further among others with the aim to ensure the optimal frequency of tutor´s motivation intervention and forms of these interventions.

5 Bibliography

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